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NEWS IN BRIEF

BY [THE ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE](#)

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LITTLE ROCK — Wal-Mart pitching in to aid stricken Japan

Wal-Mart Stores Inc.

said Wednesday that it has made an initial commitment of \$5 million in cash and in-kind donations to relief efforts in Japan, which is struggling to recover from the 9.0-magnitude earthquake and resulting tsunami that hit Friday.

Wal-Mart also said its operations around the world are planning or have fundraising drives among employees and customers.

In the first three days after the earthquake, Wal-Mart employees in Japan helped set up distribution points for relief items in store parking lots when the stores were too damaged to open, the company said. The stores and distribution centers provided donations to victims, including water, food and sanitary items.

Scott Price, executive vice president, president and chief executive officer of Wal-Mart Asia, said in a news release that supplies include 95 tons of water, acrylic blankets, tents, warm clothes, portable toilets, flashlights and batteries.

3 loan-industry bills pulled, to be studied

Bills submitted to the Arkansas Legislature to create a small-loan industry have been withdrawn.

Critics have said the proposed measures are attempts to skirt the state's limit on interest rates.

Sponsors of bills in the state House have recommended them for study after this legislative session ends.

House Bills 1846 and 1572 were withdrawn Tuesday. HB1846 would have established a small loan industry in Arkansas. HB1572 would have amended Amendment 89 in the state constitution to allow the General Assembly to set the maximum interest rate charged on loans of under \$5,000.

Senate Bill 568, the Senate version of HB1572, also was withdrawn Tuesday.

The bills were drafted by the Arkansas Installment Lenders Association Arkansas Index falls after 11 stocks drop

The Arkansas Index, a price-weighted index that tracks the largest public companies based in the state, slipped 1.03 to 206.18 Wednesday.

“U.S. stocks remained under pressure on Wednesday as Japan’s deteriorating nuclear situation and disappointing U.S. economic data weighed on the markets,” said John Blackwell, senior vice president and managing director of equity trading at Stephens Inc. in Little Rock. “The Arkansas Index moved lower as 11 stocks declined and five advanced.”

Volume for the index was 37.9 million shares, compared with average volume of 33 million shares.

The index was developed by Bloomberg News and the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette with a base value of 100 as of Dec. 30, 1997.

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